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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2736
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2120
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ AIR CONTROLLERS STAGE ONE-HOUR STRIKE
AGAINST MANAS AIR BASE

Classified By: CDA Lee Litzenberger, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) On November 26, Kyrgyz air control personnel at Manas airport conducted a one-hour work stoppage aimed at coalition aircraft operating out of Manas Air Base, which is collocated at the airport. Air Base officials, who were aware in advance of the proposed strike, had redirected aircraft during the time of the strike. Although Kyrgyz air traffic controllers have threatened to deny service to coalition aircraft in the past, this was the first time they have actually put their threats into action. The air controllers claimed they were striking to protest the fact that coalition aircraft, which account for half the flights in and out of Manas, do not pay air navigation fees to the Kyrgyz Air Navigation company. (Note: in accordance with standard international practice for state aircraft and as stipulated in our bilateral base agreement, coalition aircraft do not pay air navigation fees; charter aircraft supporting coalition activities do pay air navigation fees. End Note.) Kyrgyz air controllers have also stated that they plan to carry out a permanent strike against coalition aircraft beginning December 20, unless coalition aircraft begin paying air navigation fees.

12. (C) On November 27, Charge called an urgent meeting with Acting Foreign Minister Kydyrov. Charge complained about the unprecedented strike and expressed concern that such actions were inconsistent with Kyrgyzstan's commitment to host the base, and that they could put the lives of U.S. and coalition forces at risk. The Charge asked for Kydyrov's assurances to take whatever steps were necessary -- well before December 20 -- to ensure the continued safe flight operations of Manas air base in accordance with our bilateral agreement.

13. (C) Kydyrov said he was surprised by the strike, and had only learned of it when the Charge sought to meet. He said the Ministry would contact Kyrgyz Civil Aviation authorities to learn more details of the incident. He said he was aware that air traffic controllers were seeking higher wages; Charge responded that we had heard this, too, but were surprised to learn that earlier in November air traffic

controllers had received a significant salary increase, from \$250 to \$450 per month. Charge added that, regardless of the alleged reasons for the action, the U.S. holds the Kyrgyz government responsible for ensuring a safe operating climate for the air base. Charge noted that Kyrgyzstan receives substantial compensation for use of the base, both directly to the Kyrgyz government as well as to Manas International Airport, and we would urge the Kyrgyz to use the resources we have made available to them to ensure safe flight operations for the base. Kydyrov said he would recommend the Kyrgyz hold a meeting of their interagency commission that handles base-related issues. He added, "I understand your concerns. We have obligations under our base agreement." He also agreed to keep the Charge informed. Separately, our DATT conveyed our concerns to First Deputy Minister of Defense Oruzbayev, who chairs the internal Kyrgyz base commission. Oruzbayev indicated he was already in touch with the Ministry of Transportation and would convey our concerns, but lamented that he had no authority over that Ministry.

14. (C) Comment: The strike seems to have caught Kyrgyz officials by surprise. Our demarche may spur some initial action, and we will follow up to request what steps the Kyrgyz have taken to prevent a strike on December 20. Separately, air traffic controllers told base personnel that the strike was designed to get the Kyrgyz government's attention. It nevertheless remains puzzling why air traffic controllers chose to carry out a strike after having received a large salary increase. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and keep the Kyrgyz aware of their obligation to support the base.
LITZENBERGER